WHAT IS “COMMUNITY”? This is the central question of a new VR experience that exists in a landscape under 18” of water. Students are asked to “build” a dry personal shelter and a dry collective environment, using the blocks to rise above the water. The experience of the environment supports student success by looking at ways in which we, as life-long learners, approach the environment, interpersonal connections and the opportunities posed by learning, creativity, communications, ethics, the body politic and notions of progress.

HOW DOES IT WORK? Community is a VR-based experience, a gaming environment, shared by as few as two to four and up to about 60 students at any one time. Each student needs access to a VR headset and would assume an avatar. Each student is given a piece of property in a “bluefield,” an imaginary post-industrial, everglades-like field and asked to create paths and structures. Each student is provided with a certain number of blocks, each of which has color and each plays a musical note when touched.
WHAT ARE “COMMUNITY” CHALLENGES? Within the environment, each student is challenged to construct a dry shelter for him/herself and asked to work together to arrange a dry public gathering space accommodating the whole group. Students could decide to build paths to each other or build walls. They could build a symphony, a colorful collage, or a story. They utilize resources as they wish, and their actions, stories, paths and interactions with other form the basis for course discussions.

WHAT ARE “COMMUNITY” OPPORTUNITIES? In the course, student reflect with the instructors about how they create, how they collaborate, and how they communicate in a digital platform. They experience a new learning platform in VR, which may be one of the most important lessons of all.
COMMUNITY: A New FIU CARTA Learning Environment in VR

Initial Idea Sketches

Sketch of multiple student projects on water “Bluefield” site

Sketch of student placing “building blocks”
Aerial view in test VR environment of path formations in the water.

The COMMUNITY Environment Prototype

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Ground view in test VR environment of path formations in the water.

The COMMUNITY Environment Prototype

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On path over water to student structures.

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Sample student shelter.

The COMMUNITY Environment Prototype
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Within a sample student shelter.

The COMMUNITY Environment Prototype
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Aerial view of two students’ projects with a path between them and stacks of blocks.

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